DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 328 982 EA 022 690

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TITLE Sex Discrimination in West Virginia Principal Hiring Practices.
PUB DATE Nov 90
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration Conference (Atlanta, GA, November 11-13, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Characteristics; Administrators; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Opportunities (Jobs); Females; Higher Education; Personnel Selection; *Principals; Public Schools; *School Administration; Selective Admission; *Sex Bias; *Sex Discrimination; Sex Stereotypes; *Women Administrators
IDENTIFIERS *West Virginia

ABSTRACT

Reasons for the predominance of males in public school administrative positions are explored in this study. Methodology involved a survey of 350 graduates (175 female and 175 male) of principal certification programs in West Virginia, which yielded 258 responses, and followup interviews with 21 females who had identified sex discrimination as a major factor in their unemployment as administrators. A conclusion is that sex discrimination practices occur in the application, screening, interview, and selection stages of the administrative hiring process. Reported obstacles to female administrative employment include employers' negative attitudes toward women, sex role stereotyping, and women's lack of influential sponsors and professional networks. Respondents perceived preferential hiring and promotion practices as explanations for the gender imbalance existing in public school administrative positions. (8 references) (LMI)

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Sex Discrimination in West Virginia

Principal Hiring Practices

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November 11-13,1990

EA022690

ABSTRACT

In 1984, women constituted 87% of the nation's elementary teachers, 57% of its intermediate teachers and 52% of its secondary teachers; but they held only 18% of the public school principalships. The researchers surveyed 350 persons (175 females and 175 males) who completed principal certification programs in West Virginia between September 1, 1978 and August 31, 1985 to determine why this national phenomena is mirrored in West Virginia. Sex discrimination strategies were reportedly used in the application, screening, interview, selection and rejection stage of the administrative hiring process. Employer's negative attitudes against females; sex-role stereotyping of females; and women's lack of influential sponsors and professional network were all reported as major roadblocks to administrative employment. Respondents perceived preferential hiring and promotion practices as explanations for the sexiest imbalance in the gender of public school administrators.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation and affirmative action policies in the sixties and seventies, women of the eighties continue to be grossly underrepresented in the areas of school administration, particularly the principalship. Not only are women underrepresented among those who administer schools, but also among university professors who train administrators and boards of education which hire and fire administrators.

In 1984, although women constituted 87% of the nation's elementary teachers, 57% of its intermediate teachers and 52% of its secondary teachers, they held only 18% of the principalships nationwide--a percentage mirrored in West Virginia. Twenty-seven percent of the elementary principals were women, however, only 3% of the secondary principals were women (Jones and Montenegro, 1985) . "Clearly, women predominate in numbers but men predominate in power. Schools and school systems throughout the United States are staffed by women, but run by men." (Lovelady-Dawson, 1980, p. 18)

This trend is especially discouraging in the face of increased enrollment in advanced degree programs by women seeking educational training appropriate for movement into school administration. The number of masters and doctoral degrees in educational administration awarded to women increased from 8% in 1972 (Sadker and Harbek, 1979) to 38.7% in 1981 (Grant and Snyder, 1984). This data suggests that there is a greater pool of women with credentials than is being utilized.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to determine why males overwhelmingly outnumber females in public school administrative positions. More specifically answers to the following questions were sought:

1. Among those males and females who completed an administrative certification program in West Virginia during the seven year period from September 1, 1978 to August 31, 1985, how many currently hold administrative positions?

2. What effect, if any, does the gender of those certified to hold administrative positions have on their employment opportunities?

3. Do the respondents perceive women as victims of sexual discrimination in educational employment practices?

4. Are preferential hiring and promotional practices perceived as explanations for the sexist imbalance in education administration?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Population Sample

All male and female graduates who completed the Principal's Preparation Program and gained principal's certification during the seven year period of September 1, 1978 to August 31, 1985 from West Virginia University, Marshall University, and the West Virginia College of Graduate Studies comprised the population of this study.

A matched-pair-stratified random sample of potential administrators was taken from this population (the sum total from all of the above universities/colleges for each of the seven years). Twenty-five female graduates and twenty-five male graduates from each of the seven years were randomly chosen. The data was gathered in 1988. Consequently, the population had been certificated for 3 to 10 years--a time the researchers determined to be adequate for a candidate to have been considered if not selected for an administrative position.

Thus, the study focused on individuals who held administrative certification irrespective of whether or not they had acquired an administrative position. All previous studies that were examined had sought answers to gender discrimination questions from individuals who were listed in state directories as administrators. A much simpler technique for sample selection, obviously, but one that overlooks those individuals who have been discriminated against to the extent that they have never acquired an administrative position. Consequently, the researchers had reason to believe that earlier studies which reported on sexually discriminatory hiring practices might have understated the magnitude of the situation by virtue of only sampling successes, i.e., those individuals holding administrative positions.

The data from 258 returned usable questionnaires (123 females and 135 males) were summarized and analyzed concerning administrative candidates' personal and professional characteristics; perceptions of barriers they had encountered in their career advancement; their position seeking assertiveness and ultimate aspirational levels; and perceptions of professional success in terms of job satisfaction and professional strengths and weaknesses. These data were also analyzed to determine the relationship between variables and gender.

Treatment and Analysis of Data

A data base was created from the information gathered from the questionnaires to facilitate return monitoring and data analysis. Frequency distributions of respondents' personal and professional characteristics were compiled to provide a composite of this group of certified principals. Measures of both central tendency and dispersion were computed in the analysis of data for items with continuous variables. Chi square was used as the principal statistical technique to analyze all data. The Fisher's Exact-2 tailed test was employed in instances where Chi square was not considered the best statistical technique to use because of the size of subsets. Significant ranges were computed at the .10 level. The responses to open-ended items were analyzed and grouped into categories for presentation. Follow-up phone interviews were conducted with 21 female respondents not currently employed as principals who cited sex-discrimination as a major factor in their not attaining employment in a principal position.

DATA ANALYZED AND DISCUSSED

Data concerning administrative candidates personal and professional characteristics secured from Part I and Part II of the questionnaire utilized in this study provided the basis for construction of a typical male and typical female administrative candidate profile.

Typical Male Administrative Candidate Profile

The average male administrative candidate in this study--

- was white and 35 years old.
- was married to a fellow educator.
- had one child between the age of one and thirteen.
- was born and raised within 25 miles of his present job in West Virginia.
- had a master's degree in education with 15 or more additional hours of advanced study from a West Virginia institution.
- was not currently enrolled in an advanced degree program nor anticipated future enrollment.

If he had not attained an administrative position, he:

- was working as a secondary teacher with some athletic duties.
- had a little less than six years teaching experience.
- anticipated a move into an administrative position within a few years.
- would confine his search for an administrative position to within 150 miles of his home and, may include school systems other than his own.
- was willing to work hard for career advancement but felt that career barriers which included preferential hiring and promotional practices, lack of career mobility, and a decline in the job market had deterred his career advancement.
- saw himself as moderately successful but felt that he had not accomplished his ultimate professional goals.

If he was an administrator, he:

- received his first appointment at the age of 30.
- was a tenured elementary principal with four years of experience.
- was employed in the same school system in which he had worked as a teacher.
- had a school enrollment of 350 or more students and supervised 16 to 30 professional staff members.
- had an influential sponsor who invited him to apply for his administrative position.
- saw himself as highly successful but he would seek higher level line positions as soon as he has had more administrative experience.

Typical Female Administrative Candidate Profile

The average female administrative candidate in this study--

- was white and 36 years old.
- was married to a professional or business man.
- may have had one child but had no child under 6 years old.
- was born and raised within 25 miles of her present job in West Virginia.
- had a master's degree in education administration with 30 or more additional hours of advanced study from a West Virginia institution.
- was not currently enrolled in an advanced degree program nor anticipated future enrollment.

If she had not attained an administrative position, she:

- was working as an elementary teacher and was a building level committee member;
- had seven years teaching experience and saw the principalship as her final occupational goal;
- anticipated a move into an administrative position within five years;
- would confine her search for an administrative position to within 150 miles of her home with an emphasis on 25 miles or less;
- had strong drive and ambition and was willing to work hard for her career advancement;
- perceived sex discrimination and preferential hiring and promotional practices as a deterrent in her career advancement;
- saw herself as moderately successful but was concerned about her limited experiences in administration; and,
- felt she had not accomplished her ultimate professional goals and had been denied sufficient opportunities for advancement.

If she was an administrator, she:

- received her first appointment at the age of 33.
- had an untenured principal position and was employed in the first and only school system in which she had worked .
- administered a school with an enrollment of 200 students and 10 to 12 staff members.
- went from teaching to the principalship.
- was offered the position after receiving information from an administrator within the system and applied, or had been invited to apply.
- was satisfied with her professional success.
- may seek a principalship of a larger school or supervisory/staff position, but, will not seek higher level line positions.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Currently Employed As Principals.

Only twenty-five percent (31) of the females reported that they held principalships, compared to forty-two percent (56) of the males. When the Chi square test was calculated, significant differences were found between the percentage of female and male respondents currently employed in principal positions.

Why Not Principals.

Numerous explanations have been set forth to explain the relative absence of women as leaders in educational administration.

Lower Aspirations

To assess the validity of the explanation that "Women have lower aspirations than men--they don't want the job," survey questions concerning the number of times the respondents applied for administrative positions were examined.

Position Applications. Since certified, about one-half of the respondents, 44% females and 49% males, had applied for five or fewer positions; and, only four percent female and two percent male respondents had applied for more than five positions. Positions applied for by the respondents were mainly principalships, 48% females and 53% males, in their district of employment. Although there was only a five percent difference in the number of times female respondents applied for principal positions as compared to males, males held almost 20% more principal positions.

Lack of Career Mobility

To assess the validity of the explanation that "Women lack mobility in job seeking, men don't." survey questions concerning respondents' geographical limits in seeking administrative jobs were examined.

Mobility in Job Seeking. When the Chi square test was calculated on the respondents' geographical limits in seeking administrative jobs, no significant differences were found. About two-thirds of the (67% female and 64% male) respondents reported that they would only seek positions within a 150 mile radius of their home. The mobility rates for the women and men were found to be the same even though women did not advance in their careers at the same rate as the men.

Inadequate Training and Experience

To assess the validity of the explanation that "Women possess inadequate training and experience," survey questions concerning highest level of education; anticipated enrollment in an advanced degree program; years of teaching experience; and age distribution of respondents were examined.

Highest level of education. All of the respondents held one or more advanced degrees. This is not surprising since all West Virginia administrative programs require a master's degree. But, eleven percent more females reported that they held a master's degree plus 60 or more additional hours than did the males. When the Chi square test was calculated on the respondents' highest level of education, significant differences were found.

Anticipated enrollment in advanced degree. About one-fourth of the respondents, 21% females and 24% males, indicated that they anticipated enrollment in a doctoral program. An additional five percent of the female respondents and six percent of the males indicated enrollment in a Superintendent/Supervisory certification program. But, 50% of the respondents indicated that they did not anticipate furthering their education. No significant differences were found for the two groups of respondents in relation to their anticipated enrollment in advanced program.

Years of teaching experience. There were no significant differences found when comparing female and male administrative candidate respondents' years of elementary and secondary level classroom experience as a whole. But, significant differences appeared when the female and male respondents who acquired administrative positions were compared as to years of teaching experience prior to first administrative appointment.. Nearly three-fourths (72%) of the women administrators compared to two-thirds (67%) of the male administrators had six or more years experience prior to appointment. And, almost twice as many women (36%) had eleven or more years teaching experience in relationship to men (19%).

Age distribution of respondents. Females tended, on the average to be somewhat older than males when they received their principal's certification. Only 16% of the male respondents were 40 or older, while almost one-third (31%) of the females

were at this age level. Four female respondents were between 55 and 59 whereas no male respondents were beyond the age of 54. When the Chi square test was conducted comparing the female and male respondents' ages, significant differences were found.

The data presented suggest that there are many women with credentials not being hired for reasons other than aspirations, mobility, training, or experience. Stanley McFarland in his 1970 testimony at the United States Senate hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment stated: ". . . research shows no valid reason for the decrease in the numbers of women in administrative and supervisory positions--except the attitude of the education community." (Dale, 1973)

Barriers to Career Advancement

Fifteen factors that required rank-ordered responses in Part III of the survey questionnaire reflected many of the barriers which served as deterrents to women's career advancement that were outlined in the review of related research (Coffin and Ekstrom, 1979; Frasher and Frasher, 1979; Jones and Montenegro, 1982).

Thirty-three percent of the female respondents ranked discrimination as either a number one or number two barrier compared to fourteen percent of the males. Over one-half of the women ranked "preferential hiring and promotion" as a number one or number two barrier in contrast to less than one-third of the men. Approximately sixty-one percent of the women respondents ranked "discrimination" or "preferential hiring and promotion" as a number one or number two barrier to their career advancement.

Follow-up Phone Interviews

The 26 females not currently employed as administrators who alleged that sex discrimination constituted the major factor in their inability to attain employment in an administrative position formed the pool for the follow-up phone interviews. Twenty-one of the 26 females were ultimately contacted. Their anecdotal responses, which follow, provide clear insight into the invidious nature of sex discrimination that a female encounters in the pursuit of a principalship in too many districts.

Sex discrimination strategies used in the recruitment-announcement, application, screening, interview, selection and rejection stage of the administrative hiring

process were identified, and discussed by the interviewees. Selected comments have been presented to reveal the the perceptions and experiences voluntarily expressed by the respondents.

Recruitment-announcement

Many women reported problems with not being aware of a job opening in sufficient time to apply, or to assemble a complete application package. The respondents reported that many administrative positions specified qualifications that had little bearing on job performance but which effectively eliminated most female applicants in the first phase of the hiring process. For example, an announcement that applicants had to have had successful coaching and/or athletic director experience.

- "I called the office about an opening I heard about. I was told that no job openings existed when one really did. This was before the job was formally announced. By the way, a man was hired for the position."

- "A job was filled before I knew there was an opening. He was already in the job (principalship) before it was advertised. There's a 'good old boys club' in the county and openings are passed along to the gang."

- "A position was announced then withdrawn when 'Mr. Right' did not apply. The job description was changed to fit 'Mr. Right'--now he has the position."

- "I was Director of Personnel for three years. I was told to make changes in job descriptions to fit certain persons and eliminate others. Of course, most times these changes accommodated the hiring of males and not females."

Application

- "I have been encouraged to go out of the county to seek a job. There are no women principals in my county."

- "I applied for a position and was told not to fill out the application--'Just put your name and address on the application. We have all the other information.' They did not have other information."

- "The superintendent in my county discouraged me from applying for a principalship. He feels that women should not be principals."

- "I applied for six principal positions. No reasons were ever given for my rejection. The appointment was in the newspaper before I received a letter of rejection."

Screening

- "Applications are accepted after the cut-off date from candidates when it is advantageous to a male being hired. That happened with an out-of-state candidate. I spoke to a board member about this. That's how I finally got an interview for the job. A man was given the job, but it wasn't the man from out-of-state."

- "The requirement for a principalship I applied for was automatically set to eliminate me. I was qualified in terms of education and experience, but had not been an athletic director or coach."

Interview

Many respondents indicated that they were denied an interview. Those women who did manage to reach the interview stage were confronted with discriminatory situations and questions.

- "I applied for a principalship where I was teaching for seven years. I was certified as a principal. The superintendent would not offer me an interview; I had to demand one. The superintendent refused to discuss anything about the job with me. They hired a man with no knowledge about the school and less experience than I had.

- "In an interview I was told that if I had a child, I could not maintain my duties as a principal. I also was asked, 'Do you think the men teachers will accept you and take orders from you?"

- "I was asked in an interview, 'How will your husband feel about your taking this job? What about the kids?'"

- In the interview process there were overtones of whether a woman would measure up. "How will you have time for this job and take care of your children? What will happen if they become ill? How will you handle discipline? "

- "I served on an interviewing committee when the county was searching for an assistant superintendent. There were several qualified women for the position but the superintendent did not feel that any of them met his standards--not enough administrative experience; not high enough credentials. He appointed an interim assistant superintendent, a male with no certification. He has served in this position for three years. He still does not hold the certification that women applicants were required to hold."

Selection and Rejection

Many overt and covert sex biases were reported to flourish at this stage of the hiring process. Selection biases operated in at least two places--in the qualifications and requirements set forth for the administrative positions and in the actual interview process. Several women reported that they were required to hold administrative certification in order to apply for principalships. Males who lacked certification circumvented the requirement by having the title of the position changed to "head teacher."

Males with less teaching experience and fewer graduate hours were selected over females for both secondary and elementary principal positions. When unsuccessful female applicants confronted board members about the selection, some reasons given were:

- "We need a man to handle the discipline."

- "That is a tough school and a strong principal was needed."

- "This is an old fashioned community; and the community prefers men in that position."

- "Now is not the right time to hire a woman.

One woman described the blatant discrimination which occurred to her as follows:

• "I was encouraged to apply for a principalship but when I did they hired a man stating that he could handle the discipline better. The man who was hired had only six hours towards his administrative certificate. I had a MA+36 hours in administration. I was going to file discrimination charges so they moved the person who got the job to a 'higher' position, then offered me the job. They laughed off the incident saying, 'We flipped a coin to find the right applicant..' They knew beforehand who they wanted."

Many of the female subjects of this study cited sex discrimination and preferential hiring and promotion as significantly affecting their career advancement. The data gathered from the phone interviews corroborates their reports. Employers negative attitudes against females; sex-role stereotyping of females; and women's lack of influential sponsors and professional network were all reported as major roadblocks to administrative employment.

Those interviewed indicated that women must have many years experience and higher levels of education than a man to be even considered for an administrative position. They further indicated that if the choice for an administrative position is between a qualified female and an unqualified male, the unqualified male will be chosen.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study adds to the evidence that women do aspire to attain administrative positions, and are taking the steps they consider necessary to prepare for promotion from teacher to principal. They tend not to differ from male aspirants in race, age, mobility, and family responsibilities. Moreover, females who apply for positions have more years of experience, and more graduate hours.

This study lends support to the thought that the paucity of females in the principalship is a result of sex discrimination strategies used in the application, screening, interview, selection and rejection stage of the administrative hiring process.

The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that:

1. Men receive more encouragement from their supervisors/board members to seek administrative positions than do women with comparable qualifications.

2. Sex-role stereotyping limits women's opportunities for educational administration careers.

3. Preferential hiring and promotion practices are perceived as explanations for the sexist imbalance in education administration.

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